

Dark Tourism as Humanist Leisure Experience – approximations between seemingly distant concepts

O Turismo Negro como Experiência de Ócio Humanista – aproximações entre conceitos aparentemente distantes

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Abstract

In this paper we have strived to make an approximation between two concepts, apparently very distant from one another: Dark Tourism and the humanist leisure experience. Dark Tourism concerns the tourist activity in places somewhat related to death and suffering. Humanist Leisure, understood here from the perspective of the author Manuel Cuenca (2000, 2010), is a human experience, a voluntary and pleasant occupation without any other purpose. Through a literature review, we show how, in reality, a Dark Tourism experience can constitute in a true humanist leisure experience that fosters a recreation of the understanding that individuals have of themselves and of others.

Keywords: Dark Tourism, mediator, humanist leisure, leisure experience, recreation

Resumo

Neste trabalho procuramos fazer uma aproximação entre dois conceitos aparentemente muito distantes: o Turismo Negro e a experiência de ócio humanista. O Turismo Negro diz respeito à atividade turística em locais de alguma forma relacionados com a morte e o sofrimento. O ócio humanista, entendido aqui na perspectiva do autor Manuel Cuenca (2000, 2010), constitui-se como uma vivência humana, uma ocupação voluntária e prazerosa sem qualquer outro fim que esse mesmo. Através de uma revisão de literatura, mostramos como, na realidade, uma experiência de Turismo Negro pode ser uma verdadeira experiência de ócio humanista que propicia a recriação do sentido que o indivíduo faz de si mesmo e dos outros.

Palavras-chave: Turismo Negro, mediação, Ócio humanista, experiência de ócio, recriação

Introduction

To make a connection between Dark Tourism, i.e. tourism in places of death and suffering, and Leisure, in particular author Manuel Cuenca's Humanist Leisure, may seem an inglorious attempt to forcibly relate two concepts that have nothing to do with each other.

However, when we are familiar with both concepts and practices, we realize that there are deep similarities linked to the more essential and subjective character of their experiences.

Dark Tourism can be defined in many ways, both from a supply and a demand perspective; however there is a common element to all perspectives of analysis: a concrete and identifiable connection with death, either on the visited attractions, or on tourists' motivations.

Humanist Leisure, according to Cuenca (2010), concerns satisfying and pleasurable experiences, which constitute an end by themselves and that result from autonomy of the subject who experiences them, being intimately linked to one's system of values and meanings.

At a time when multidisciplinary and hybrid approach are seen as the way forward within the scientific community, we dare to propose the idea that these concepts, apparently so different, actually have several points in common. Moreover, we assert that Dark Tourism can be an experience of Humanist Leisure with the ability to provide recreation for the individual that experiences it.

With this idea as a starting point, this paper is based on a literature review - focusing mainly on the publications of authors Manuel Cuenca, Clerton Martins, Philip Stone, Philippe Ariès and Anthony Giddens - and seeks to identify and explain commonalities between Humanist Leisure and Dark Tourism.

Therefore, in this article we follow a structure that needs to be explained: instead of offering initially a theoretical context for each of the areas in question, and afterwards weaving considerations about their similarities, we decided to take the reader to ponder with us upon each of the points where, in our view, Dark Tourism and Humanist Leisure meet, finally offering a summary which should not be seen as a conclusion, but as a starting point for a possible reading of the two concepts.

1. Both stem from recent areas of study for the Academy, but their roots are much older

The first meeting point between Dark Tourism and Humanist Leisure is the fact that they are both themes that were established as areas of academic study only by the end of the last century.

The very concept of Dark Tourism is very recent: it dates from 1996, when Lennon & Foley (1996, p. 198) attributed this name to "the phenomenon which encompasses the presentation and consumption (by visitors) of real and commodified death and disaster sites".

Previously to that, other authors had already dwelled on the study of tourism related to death and suffering, such as Rojek, who in 1993 suggested the idea that there were "black spots" in tourism, which he considers to be "commercial developments of grave sites and sites in which celebrities or large numbers of peoples have met with sudden and violent deaths" (Rojek, 1997, p. 136), or Blom, for whom Morbid Tourism is "an attraction-focused artificial morbidity-related tourism" that "focuses on sudden violent death and which quickly attracts large numbers of people" (Blom, 2000, p. 32).

From a demand perspective, (Seaton, 1996) is another author who has proposed a name for the tourism-related death and suffering: Thanatourism, a kind of tourism where "thanatopsis" (contemplation of death) is the main interest of tourists.

It was not until the twenty-first century that studies on Dark Tourism gained wider dissemination, with the adoption of this name and popularization of Stone's (2006, p. 146) definition of Dark Tourism: "the act of travel to sites associated with death, suffering, and the seemingly macabre. "

However, some authors argue that the practice of Dark Tourism is much older than its academic study.

Sharpley (2009, p. 4), believes that:

“for as long as people have been able to travel, that have been drawn – purposefully or otherwise – towards sites, attractions or events that are linked in one way or another with death, suffering, violence or disaster”

Stone (2006, p.147) states that "early examples of Dark Tourism may be found in the patronage of Roman gladiatorial games" and that the Colosseum was one of the first Dark Tourism attractions. Public executions, "of the medieval period up until the nineteenth century" are also manifestations of Dark Tourism according to the same author (ibid., p.147).

MacCannel (1989, apud Sharpley, 2009, p. 5) reports that visits to morgues were usually part of the tours to the city of Paris in the nineteenth century, and Beech (2000, apud Sharpley, 2009) states that military buildings have since long been tourist attractions.

Like Dark Tourism, Leisure is also a recent area of studies for the Academy.

It was only in 1988 that the first center of Leisure Studies, the Institute of Estudios de Ocio, at the University of Deusto (Bilbao, Spain), was created, first as a department attached to the Faculty of Philosophy and Educational Sciences, but earning his autonomy before the rector in 1992 (Cuenca, 2008).

However, the concept of Leisure is much older. The word leisure has its roots in the Latin "otium" and Greek "skholē" (Boullosa, 2012).

The Greek word "skholē" which meaning was absorbed by the Latin term, has a multiple meaning: free time or "leisure" activities performed during that time (in particular lectures, discussions and other exercises in rhetoric), and the place where these lectures happened, school (Wikimedia Foundation, 2012).

In the Classical Era, "otium" also contained two meanings: "otium otiosum" which meant a hedonic time, free of activities, and "otium negotiosum", a time that demanded greater involvement of the individual and when he was devoted to intellectual pursuits and contemplative enriching (Boullosa, 2012).

In pre-industrial societies, work and play activities did not constitute separate times (Aquino & Martins, 2007). The separation between work and leisure space-time only appears after the Industrial Revolution. With the Industrial Revolution, idleness becomes opposite to work, which is seen as the source of all virtues, while idleness is seen as the source of all vices (ibid.).

It was from this conception that idleness has developed a meaning that endures to the present day: laziness, sloth, lack of activity – thus losing the reflective nature of classical antiquity and being now seen as something negative.

In contrast, the word leisure comes to us with a positive connotation and gains importance in a Europe that was still suffering from the effects of World War II, the Cold War and the decline of dictatorial regimes, with Dumazedier's Sociology of Leisure, which defines leisure as the autonomous and pleasurable activities of fun, enjoyment and development that the individual engages in his spare time (Aquino & Martins, 2007). The idea of free time supposes an

opposition, i.e., assumes the existence of time that is "not free." This opposition leads to a negative conception of what we have to free ourselves from, which would be work.

With Cuenca and other authors from the school of Deusto, we are witnessing a revival of the reflective and recreating dimensions of leisure. This author has a humanist perspective of Leisure, which places the individual as a central element of the experience.

According to Cuenca (2000), leisure is not a time, busy or free, because time does not define human action, and neither does activity, because, depending on who performs it, an activity may or may not be a leisure experience.

For this author, (ibid., p.64) "the humanistic experience of leisure is, or should be, an integral and experience related to one's meaning of life and values, consistent with all of them." The same author (Cuenca, 2010, p. 69) further states:

"Leisure experiences should open up the areas that have always been attached to the development of humanist leisure: disinterested knowledge, reflection, contemplation, creativity and openness to transcendence."

2. Both can be experienced at different levels of intensity

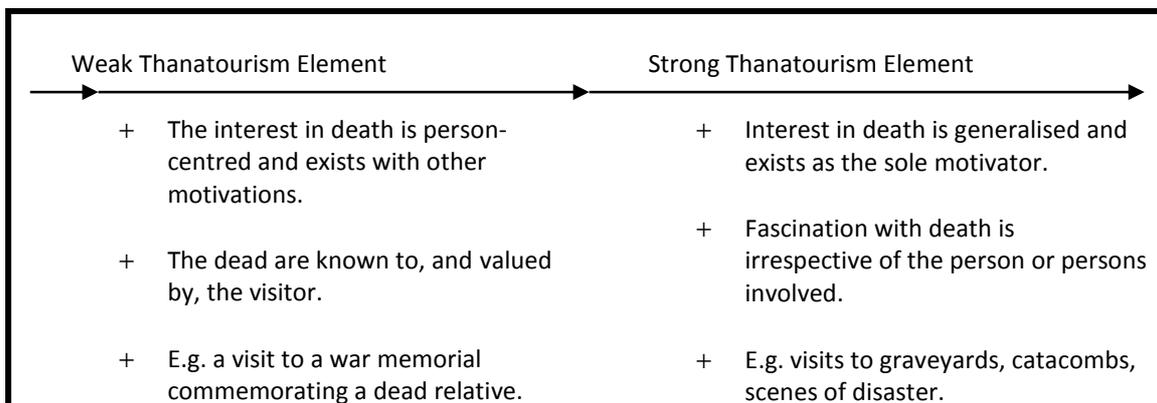
Another point in common between Dark Tourism and Leisure is the notion of different intensities in their experience, depending on the individual who experiences it.

The idea of intensities in Dark Tourism was introduced by Seaton (1996). For this author, who puts the individual and their motivations as a key element of this type of tourism, Thanatourism is not an absolute concept, but:

"[the] travel to a location wholly, or partially, motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death, particularly, but not exclusively, violent death, which may, to a varying degree be activated by the person-specific features of those whose deaths are its focal objects". (Seaton, 1996, p. 40)

As can be seen in figure 1 below, this author presents a continuum of intensity in Thanatourism, which is based on two values: the extent that the interest in death is relative to the person or to the scale of death, and whether the interest in death is the only motivation for the visit or one of several (Seaton, 1996).

Figure 1 – Seaton's Continuum of Intensity in Thanatourism Seaton (ad. from Coutinho, 2012).



As Seaton did for Tourism Negro, Cuenca (2010), states that Leisure can be lived according to different levels of intensity.

According to the author, the experiences of leisure are assessed by the subject according to the degree of satisfaction that they cause, either during the time they occur, or as a result of it (ibid.). In this perspective, the experience of leisure can range from the "mere acceptance and uptake of experience", to the "receptive and contemplative immersion, that offers us an intense experience, unforgettable, cathartic" (Cuenca, 2010, p. 71).

The same author also states:

"the feelings raised by a memorable leisure experience move between opposite extremes, such as fear and joy, or apparently conflicting feelings such as fear and pleasure. This is what allows, on some occasions, to achieve the cathartic experience that leaves a pleasant satisfaction." (Cuenca, 2010, p. 68)

3. Both have an importance contextualized in characteristics of contemporary society

As we have seen, it can be argued that both Dark Tourism and Humanist Leisure come from ancient practices that recently gained the attention of academics. Although the reasons why these areas of study have become popular at the moment are much more complex than we can even begin to cover in the scope of this work, we have collected the arguments of some authors on aspects of contemporary society that may offer a context for the importance of the study and the experiences of Dark Tourism and Humanist Leisure.

In the case of Dark Tourism, its importance becomes meaningful when one considers the contemporary attitude towards death, which is to remove it from everyday life (Giddens 1991; Stone, 2009), hide it and make it taboo (Ariès, 1988) but at the same time, let her invade us daily through the media and popular culture (Durkin, 2003). In other words, we can say that the contemporary attitude towards death is paradoxical. Stone (2009) calls it the paradox of absent / present death.

This paradox is related to the natural tendency of society to exclude from everyday issues all that, such as death, can disrupt the social environment in which human life takes place, causing angst or primordial anxiety (Kierkegaard, 1944, apud Giddens, 1991). According to Stone (2009), the ubiquity of death causes it to overcome this process of exclusion and being somehow present in everyday life, which will lead to contact with angst, which in turn will cause what Giddens (1991) entitles "ontological insecurity".

Furthermore, there also occurred a process of desacralization of death (Ariès 1988, Giddens, 1991), which not only made disappear the traditional mechanisms by which the individual dealt with death but also stripped it of public meaning.

According to Giddens (1991), contemporary society has not created new scientific truths and values to attribute new meanings to death, and one is now forced to find one's own way to make sense of life and death. This task is further complicated by nowadays cultural diversity, which, while providing a very wide range of resources, forces the individual to make a distressing selection in order to build their mechanisms for dealing with death and answer their intrinsic need for stability and security, or ontological security (Giddens, 1991).

It is in this context that the importance of institutions and mechanisms that allow some contact between the living and the dead fits: they are called mediators of death. These mediators are actually nothing more than a filter, that allows people to not deal with death directly (Walter, 2009), thereby decreasing the feeling of "ontological insecurity" (Giddens, 1991).

According to Walter (2009, p.43), the mediating institutions between the living and the dead in contemporary Western society are: "archeology, graves, genealogy, music, literature, law, the family, language (oral and written), photographs, history". The same author (ibid.) states that the last three are the ones that give rise to the two main mediating institutions in our society:

mass media and tourism, which are means of dissemination and interpretation of death and suffering for thousands of people.

The importance of the Leisure experience, understood here from a humanist perspective, is more deeply understood if contextualized within the value of work and the notion of time to contemporary society, as well as its hyper-consumerism and imperative of happiness.

With the Industrial Revolution, work was seen as the central activity of people's lives and the fundamental value, a source of virtues (Aquino & Martins, 2007). In post-industrial society, that has changed: one has to fulfill one's labor and subsistence obligations, yet at the same time one wants to be able to get rid of them and have time to dedicate oneself to oneself (ibid.).

The way we manage and live time has to do with cultural factors, i.e., each subject values the sense of time in a unique way. This time is different from the chronological time dictated by the ticking clock: it is social time (Aquino & Martins, 2007).

According to Munné (1980, apud Aquino & Martin, 2007), social time is divided into four types: psychobiological time, socioeconomic time, socio-cultural time and free time.

Psychobiological time relates to the physiological and psychic most basic human necessities, and is endogenously conditioned. The time that is devoted to socio economic needs, i.e., to one's source of income, is usually hetero-conditioned. Socio-cultural time refers to the sociability of the individual, and may be more or less hetero or auto- conditioned. Free time is one in which human action occurs without external necessity. Or at least it should be. However, consumerism and exerted its influence mercantiled this time, depriving it of meaning (Aquino & Martins, 2007).

In our society, we are trained from childhood to work, without contemplation education for the use of leisure. This can cause a dangerous alienation effect, both at work (the worker only concentrates on tasks and is not creative), as in spare time (for not knowing how to use it properly) (Aquino & Martins, 2007).

Nevertheless, today leisure appears to us in the sense of free time, truly free time, when the one can devote oneself to what makes one happy (Cuenca, 2000, 2010).

In contemporary society, happiness was somewhat standardized and withdrawn from within the individual (Pinheiro, Rhoden, & Martins, 2010). The pursuit of happiness, a modernist ideal, reveals itself today as an imperative based on consumer experiences (Pinheiro, Rhoden, & Martins, 2010). In this hyper consumer society, the individual is happy for what has, and what he has constitutes his identity (Pedroza, 2008).

But the very idea of happiness conveyed by society is volatile, the wishes and aspirations of the individual are constantly growing in volume and intensity, and are quickly replaced after satisfied (Pedroza, 2008). In this society where consuming is required, the individual himself was commodified and became a commodity, something that should remain sellable (Pedroza, 2008).

It is thusly created a society of hyper consumers anonymous, individualistic together because they all seek their happiness in collective consumerism. At the same time, one loses sight of the subjectivity of happiness as being within the individual.

However, leisure is not restricted to time off work. Neither does it oppose consumption and needs of capitalism. Rather, it integrates them somehow. Leisure is not a chronological time, nor is the simple lack of activities. More than all this, leisure is an attitude towards life that results from a learning process that seeks integral personal growth, the possibility of truly "being" (Aquino & Martins, 2007). While contemporary life requires a fast learning and an instant forgetting, leisure allows natural learning, internalized by the individual (ibid.).

4. Both provide recreational and reframing experiences for the individual

The last parallel between the Dark Tourism and Humanist Leisure that we address in this work is perhaps the most important and relates to the ability that both have to empower the one who experience them, creating new meanings of self, others, and the world .

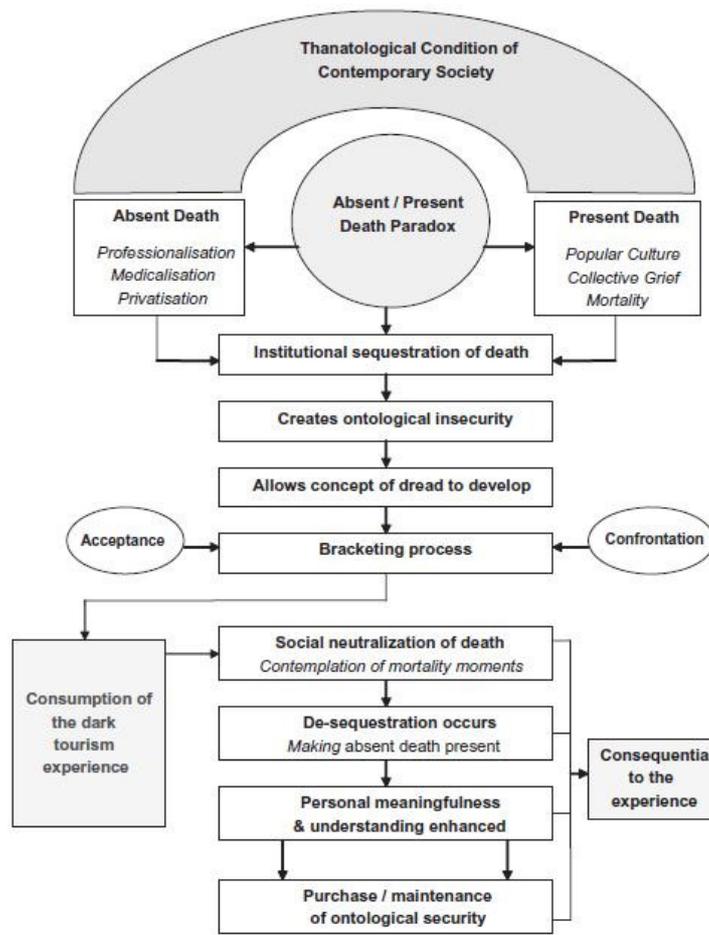
Dark Tourism is a place of excellence for the individual to develop their constructions of mortality and reflect on the human condition as it provides a socially accepted and sometimes even sanctioned environment (Stone, 2009).

Stone's model - Figure 2 on the following page-shows how the Dark Tourism can help the individual to deal with mortality.

From the contemporary attitude towards death and the paradox of absent / present death, the model shows the formation of ontological insecurity and the emergence of the need for contact with death somehow. Dark Tourism then emerges as a means of contact and "re-conceptualization of death and mortality into forms that stimulate something other than primordial terror and dread" (Stone & Sharpley, 2008, p. 585), thus promoting the creation of some ontological security.

Stone (2011, p.28) identified four reasons that explain the role of Dark Tourism as a mediator of death in contemporary society. The first is that Dark Tourism represents and communicates death. The second reason mentioned by the author is that Dark Tourism gives the visitor the opportunity to accumulate "capital of death", which you can then use when you need to reflect on it. The fact that Dark Tourism sites constitute locations where contemporary mortality is reconfigured and revitalized, thereby mediating the complexity of death, is the third of the reasons given by the author to explain why the Dark Tourism is a mediator between the individual and death. The last reason mentioned by Stone (2011) is the fact that Dark Tourism mediates what is apparently the macabre by symbolically displaying death.

Figure 2 - Dark tourism consumption within a thanatological framework (Stone & Sharpley, 2008)



As with Dark Tourism, Leisure constitutes "a suitable space, possibly one of the most suitable for the development and survival of values in their multiple fields" (Cuenca, 2010, p. 69). In fact, Leisure can even be a source of balance or correction of personal or social imbalances and deficiencies (ibid.).

The humanistic perspective of Leisure considers it not as a superficial experience, but as something deeply rooted within the individual, and which has a recreational power (Cuenca, 2000). We should not confuse recreational - to "recreate" create anew with "recreational" - which provides pleasure or delight, but Leisure is capable of both.

Kreikemans (1973, p. 525, apud Cuenca, 2000, p.63) defines Leisure as "a 'recreation', i.e. a means to restore the will and the value of life." Cuenca (2000) argues that Humanist Leisure has the ability to give personal development in transcendent experiences that cause the individual to expand his horizons of knowledge and understanding.

The same author also stresses the importance of the autotelic character of leisure, claiming that one's experiences have value only to one's needs (Cuenca, 2010). Leisure, being a subjective experience limited only by the individual, can be a means of resubjectivation; of an experience of human development that allows the individual to create new meanings of himself and his surroundings, as he gets to know more of himself and of the world (Pinheiro, Rhoden, & Martins, 2010).

Final thoughts

Throughout this paper we have established several parallels between Dark Tourism and Humanist Leisure, aiming to make known two still very little studied concepts that are very different on the surface, but actually have several similarities.

The first of these similarities is, as we have seen, the fact that both concepts come from practices far older than their academic study. Dark Tourism is seen by some authors, such as Sharpley (2009), as a practice as old as the ability to mobilize humans, however it only gained size as an area of studies at the end of the last century; the very concept of Dark Tourism Negro was also not widely adopted at that time. Leisure has roots in the Classical Era, figuring prominently in the lifestyle of the Greeks and Romans, yet was despised and devalued from the Industrial Revolution to the last decades of the last century, and is now back to being the focus of attention of scholars.

In addition, both of these concepts are combined with subjective experiences that vary according to the one who does them and the intensity with which he perceives them.

Another similarity between Dark Tourism and Humanist Leisure is that they have an importance that must be understood within a framework of characteristics of contemporary society, such as a mandatory search of happiness, which excludes from everyday life anything that might cause angst - like death - but that was removed from the interior of the individual and now rests in a volatile background of hyper-consumerism. The very notion of current time was commodified and aggravates the possibility of angst when you do not know what to do with it.

In this context, the ability to provide recreation and reframing experiences that is present in the practices of both concepts gains its importance. Dark Tourism is an important mediator between individuals and death by allowing them to contact with a more or less sanitized death and build their mechanisms to deal with it and reflect on their human condition while in safe and socially accepted environments, which will result in a much lower distress. Humanist Leisure may have a role in personal development and even equilibrium for an individual, since their experiences are moments of recreation and resubjectivation which can give, to those who experience them, new meanings for themselves and for the world.

According to Cuenca (2010, p.68), "a leisure experience has meaning in that 'I like', a little rational argument, but a sign of personal affirmation." In this sense, anything can be an experience of leisure, obviously including Dark Tourism.

Nevertheless, we are aware that we have but outlined the points where these two concepts meet. Much more could be said about the evolution of concepts, for example. But also the sociological, psychological and philosophical matters related to Dark Tourism and Humanist Leisure are deserving of a much deeper reflection than what we set out to do this work. Even more important would be to deepen the study of the role that the practices of Dark Tourism and Humanist Leisure play in contemporary society and their significance for who experiences them. However, this was not our goal. What we wanted to do was to simply open the door for such investigations to be made.

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